

Identity and Belonging

The Member of the Wedding

When thinking about the above prompt and who we are, we need go no further than our protagonist: Frankie, F. Jasmine and finally Frances. These ‘transformations’ of identity are linked to important stages of Frankie’s development and reveal just how powerful the need to fit in can be.

Frankie’s background cannot change, but what we see is her physical change from being a ‘Freak’, where ‘she had grown so tall that she was almost a big freak, and her shoulders were narrow, her legs too long’ and where her reflection, or image of herself was ‘warped and crooked’. At the start of the story Frankie really is at that difficult stage, what Judy Garland called being an ‘in-between’. The need to fit in becomes crucial for her and so the news of her brother’s wedding excites her – thinking that she *can* change who she is. The desire to be ‘somebody else except me’ rings true with many of us, especially if our surroundings and support base is not secure.

In an attempt to find happiness the ‘old Frankie’ becomes ‘F. Jasmine’. Her rejection of her old self seems complete as Frankie imagines her life with the married couple, Jarvis and Janice. Believing that she doesn’t connect, she ignores the important relationship she has with Berenice and John Henry. Berenice, with her two different coloured eyes, comes to symbolise the conflict that can lie within us all; who we are and who we *think* we should be.

The fact that she sees them as ‘moths’ that ‘keep hanging around the windows’ reveals Frankie’s blindness to the connections and ‘belonging’ she has. In thinking that something better lies beyond, she misses what she has – something we have all done.

Frankie’s desires to belong are common to us all. And just like her, we often have to learn the hard way that denying who we are can lead to pain. The whole plan to transform herself fizzles and Frankie – just as the prompt suggests – learns that we can never change who we are. But what the text also suggests is that we can change how we think and view the world.

Frankie’s experiences, and even her dislike of herself, remind us that we can choose how we live and see those around us. In linking this text to the prompt, Frankie’s journey from innocence to experience is one common to us all. Perhaps we all need to ‘clunk’ and ‘stumble’ our way through life in order to appreciate who we are and accept who we are.